DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 435 TM 014 453

AUTHOR	Bagin, Carolyn Boccella
TITLE	Talking to Your High School Students about Standardized Tests. ERIC Digest No. 105.
INSTITUTION	American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Feb 89
CONTRACT	RI-88062003
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Achievement Tests; Aptitude Tests; High Schools; *High School Students; *Secondary School Teachers; *Standardized Tests; Student Reaction; *Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; *Test Coaching; Testing Problems; Test Interpretation; Test Use
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest explains basic elements of standardized tests in order to help teachers in making students feel comfortable about taking such tests. Usually created by commercial publishers, standardized tests are designed to provide a common measure of students' performance. They help compare an individual student's performance with the performance of a group of students from a given class, school, or school system. They also help compare students' performance across the country. Standardized achievement and aptitude tests are described, and their limitations are discussed. Means of helping students prepare for testing are outlined, and pointers for helping students assess the testing experience following the test and after receiving the test results are provided. A list of additional literature resources is included. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation Digest No. 105, February 1989

ED315435

Talking to Your High School Students About Standardized Tests

by Carolyn Boccella Bagin

Although your school district may have counselors or testing specialists who explain standardized test procedures and test results to high school students, as a teacher, your students may look to you for some answers about testing.

This digest explains basic elements about tests and gives you some hints so that you can help your students feel comfortable with standardized tests. If your students understand the role that standardized tests play in their school careers, they may be more at ease when they take them, and thus, may perform better on them.

What Are Standardized Tests?

Usually created by commercial test publishers, standardized tests are designed to give a common measure of students' performance. They help compare an individual student's performance with the performance of a group of students from a given class, school, or school system. They also help compare students' performances across the country. Since large numbers of students throughout the country take the same test, "standards" can be developed to show whether school programs are succeeding or how students are performing.

Different types of standardized tests have different purposes. Standardized achievement tests measure how much your students have already learned about school subjects, such as reading, math, language skills, spelling, or science. Standardized aptitude tests measure your students' ability to learn in school. They measure verbal ability, mechanical ability, creativity, clerical ability, or abstract reasoning. Some popular tests include the California Achievement Tests (CAT), the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), or the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.

Your students need to understand that standardized tests have limitations; they give isolated snapshots of performance at a specific time. You can help them learn that tests do not measure perfectly what students can or cannot do. Students have skills and abilities that standardized tests cannot measure, and many factors can affect their scores on a particular test. In fact, test scores can vary from day to day.

How Can You Help Your Students Prepare for a Test?

Before your students take a standardized test, review these tips so that they are ready to do their best.

Before the test. . .

1. Help your students understand that testing is a normal school activity. When they reach particular grade levels, students throughout the country take standardized tests as part of planned school programs.
2. Tell your students the purpose of the test they will take, how long they will wait for test results, and how the test results will be used.
3. Explain how they will receive the test results -- if the results will be mailed directly to their homes and if, as a matter of course, their counselors will schedule meetings to discuss them.
4. Briefly explain normal testing procedures. Tell them when and where they will take the test, how long the test will take, and what kind of pencils they should have. Tell them to arrive early at the test site; it will help them remain calm. If you monitor the test, be sure all the students fully understand the test directions.
5. Many students are unfamiliar with timed tests and, thus, become anxious about them. It may help if

TM014453

they practice answering timed questions on their own sometime before the test day. If the testing company provides practice booklets, encourage your students to use them; they help in understanding how the particular test works.

6. Tell your students to carefully mark each answer. They can erase an answer, but they must erase it thoroughly. These tests are scored by a machine, and the machine may read the answer the student wanted to erase if it is not erased thoroughly. If the machine finds two answers marked for one question, it will not count either one.

7. Remind your students that they'll have to stay aware of the time throughout the entire test and, if they finish early, they should review their answers.

8. Guessing can have a great impact on your students' results. Find out how the particular test is scored and if students are penalized for guessing.

9. Tell your students not to spend too much time on any one question. They may find it helpful to skip the hardest questions and then go back to them later.

10. Mention the hazards of statements that say "All of the above" or "None of the above."

11. For number problems, tell your students to estimate their answers before working them out. That way, they can tell if their calculations are reasonable.

After the test . . .

1. Immediately after the test, encourage your students to talk about their experience. Discussions may help them to vent any frustration they feel about the testing process.

2. When students receive their test results, don't discuss an individual's test scores in front of the entire class. Talk about the class's performance as a whole. You may want to discuss these questions:

   - Was the class's performance above or below the performance of other students in the district?
   - In what areas did the class do best?
   - In what areas did the class have difficulty?
   - Were the class's results consistent with day-to-day performance?

3. If you discuss test scores with students, set up private conferences with them. Encourage them to interpret their own performance.

   - Do they think the scores accurately assessed their abilities or knowledge?
   - How do their scores compare with their classroom performance?
   - Were their scores higher or lower than they anticipated?

4. If you do discuss test scores with individual students, be careful of the words you use. Students may have a natural curiosity or anxiety about test results; they could be easily misled by unguarded comments.

5. Remind students that they shouldn't make major decisions about their futures based on the results of one test. They need to consider their entire school history, their grade records, and their activities and interests before they solidify their career goals.

Where Can You Go for More Information?

This digest highlights some important points about testing, but you may want to explore these issues further. Here is a list of some helpful resources.

Herndon, Enid B. *Your Child and Testing.* Washington, DC: NIE, October 1980.

Illinois State Board of Education. *Assessment Handbook: A Guide for Assessing Illinois Students.* 1988.

Lyman, Howard B. *Test Scores and What They Mean.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986.

Michigan State Board of Education. *Pencils Down! A Guide for Using and Reporting Test Results.* 1987.

National Education Association. *Standardized Testing Issues: Teachers' Perspectives.* Washington, DC: NEA, 1977.

National School Public Relations Association. *A Parent's Guide to Standardized Aptitude and Achievement Testing.* Arlington, VA: NSPRA, 1978.

Rudman, Herbert C. "Classroom Instruction and Tests: What Do We Really Know About the Link?" *NASSP Bulletin*. February 1987, pp. 3-21.

Weinstein, Claire E. *How to Help Your Children Achieve in School.* Washington, DC: NIE, March 1983, ERIC ED 233814.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract R-88-062003. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI or the Department of Education. **Permission is granted to copy and distribute this ERIC/TM digest.**